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**ASSERTION FORMS OF WOMEN’S STATUTE AND
AUTHORITY FROM PRINCELY FAMILIES IN
MOLDAVIA (XIV-XVII CENTURIES)**

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Introduction

The present paper does not aim to continue discussions on woman's status during Middle Ages from Romanian Countries or from other parts, but to approach an angle less known in the Romanian historiography: women's presence in the sphere of power. Therefore, we are not going to insist on women's presentation as mothers, wives or daughters unless these qualities marked out a privileged status in the hierarchy of the society.

We consider it is necessary and at the same time useful to pause upon the creation of an overview able to highlight the actions of the women from the princely families of XIV-XVII century Moldavia, which are less visible in a world dominated by masculine will. During Middle Ages, there were women who got involved in the social life and even in ruling the country. But, of course these implications represented, most of the times, exceptions, special cases, that came off for a short period of time and in special conditions. These were temporary cases, because everything that got beyond attributions related to the house and family, were considered as totally inappropriate for women.

When we are talking about women from princely families, we bear in mind the mothers, the wives and the daughters of the princes. We decided to focus on these persons because the sources of the time allow us to find out more information about them. We did not press the point on the other categories of family connections- aunts, nieces, cousins- unless they entered in one or more of the situations described above.

From a chronological perspective, our research covers the XIV- XVII centuries, from the very first written mentions regarding the feminine cream to the beginnings of modernity. The temporal borderlines are ample, maybe too ample, but they appeared as a necessity imposed by the nature of the debated subject, and most of all by the sources, not all generous-numerically speaking- that we were welcomed to use.

Like we announced in the title of the thesis, we are going to follow the ways wherewith women from royal families stand up for their *status* and *authority*. But how can we apply these concepts within the framework of the history of noble women of Moldavian Middle Ages? To begin with, we have to mention that deliberately, we

excluded a third concept- the one related to power- frequently correlated with the first two, because we make a point of speaking of status and authority, than power, attached par excellence to the masculine element of this period.

Unlike Romanian historiography, the occidental one has registered more contributions in the field of studying the history of women. From the first works dedicated to the women of Middle Ages it is worth reminding the contributions of Regine Pernoud. To these can be annexed the works of Georges Duby. Neither the Byzantine space was neglected; Charles Diehl being the one who introduced in the historical network papers that comprise biographies of the queens of Byzantium.

The first works belonging to Romanian historiography dedicated exclusively to women took also the shape of biographies. Maybe under the influence of Charles Diehl, Nicolae Iorga brought into the attention of the historians from the beginning of the XX century a new manner of beholding and understanding facts of the past- women's history as integral part of that of men. His approaching comes under the same category of descriptive style, typically as a matter of fact to the historic writings of that period.

The studies realized up to the present, on this topic, have a fragmented character and deal only with a part of the aspects of history of women from princely families. Among the researchers who contributed to the woman's delineation in the Moldavian space but also Walachian, we remind Sorin Iftimi, Maria Magdalena Székely, Georgeta Chirilă (Fodor), Constanța Ghițulescu or Șarolta Solcan.

The originality of the thesis lies in the way of approaching the problem, our intention being to realize an overall image of some of the aspects mentioned also in studies more antique, which we are going to debate in our own manner, and to bring into discussion some aspects insufficiently or not at all discussed until now. We propose the analysis in individual chapters in what regards the affirmation of the state and the consolidation of women's authority from the princely families, in whose structure we bear in mind, first of all, the sources we owned. It is also necessary to mention that for each of the chapters we set ourselves to write and integrate to the present thesis; we had to go through papers belonging to other fields of history like ethnography, folklore, heraldry, archeology or theology. These proved to be of great help, almost compulsory, in order to finish the present paper. The thesis is structured in four chapters, being

accompanied by an introduction, conclusions, illustrations and bibliographical references organized after the norms that are in force.

Being that the information about the feminine element are appreciable more limited than those related to the masculine element, the research field of the proposed subject had to be extended on all the sources that proved to be helpful in indentifying and recovering the aspects of social and political range they run into. One of the main sources, which are the basis for our work, is the source of narrative. In this respect, we can mention Slavo-Romanian Chronicles or Grigore Ureche's annals, Ion Neculce and Miron Costin. Without minimizing the importance of these sources, dependent to a large extent to a description of events, chronicles belonging to Pseudo-Enache Kogălniceanu, Pseudo-Amiras , Dimitrie Cantemir, seem to be more useful if we take into account that they share much information relating to women. Where we considered it necessary, we appealed also to the narrative sources written for the history of the Romanian Country by Radu Greuceanu and Radu Popescu. To these we can add the consignments of the outlander travelers, who have described details about women of the Moldavian Society. Beyond the relativity of narrative sources, there is a fundamental limit-the subjectivity they were written with because their authors were men. Either monks or high officials, they were commissioned to write the annals of the country by the rulers, and the result was a history written by men and for men forthcoming to their use.

Another category of sources used are the documents. Either they had been emitted by queens or princesses, their role remain equally important. Representations of iconography have allowed us to observe the way in which queens and princesses were represented during the vintage era, their clothes and their jewelries. At the same time, the reports of the archeological researches that took place in the limits of the princely courts and of some monuments belonging to the court queens, revealed the existence of some resemblances between the found objects and the way they were described in the written sources. We appealed to special and general works that settled into shape the general context historical, political, social and economical of the period discussed, without which it would have been impossible defining the context where we placed our research.

The diversity of the materials we used and the fragmented way they could be found represented the main difficulty of our undertaking. Working with them challenged

an adequate methodology. Firstly, we appealed to analysis, sometimes critical, of the sources we were able to find. Furthermore we proposed a personal interpretation in what regards the case of the iconographic representation and of the subjects that stirred the attention of the other researchers before us. For the narrative sources, it was sometimes necessary to apply, regressively, information from the XVIII century in order to reconstruct on their foundation realities from antecedent centuries.

Part of the results of the present research was made public, attiring the form of scientific sessions through the country, published articles or approved to publishing. We did not aim to realize an exhaustive research on this subject; we simply consider our contribution a step ahead in what concerns the examination of an aspect not at all insignificant of the evolution of women from princely families of the XIV-XVII centuries.

I CHAPTER: Symbols of the status achieved by women from princely families

Insignia that confirmed the membership to the highest degree of the Moldavian social hierarchy were the crown, the aulic costume and the seal. The Majesty idea was rounded by the costumes and the jewels women belonging to the royal families used to wear at ceremonies and feasts. The titles that appeared next to the name of the Moldavian queens and princesses originated from the Byzantium- Serb space, Polish-Lithuanian or Slave and come as an equilibration of the titles used by princes, hinting at the same time towards the origin of the queens. Another proof of their illustrious origin and heritage is the bicephalous eagle. Following the pattern of their husbands, the queens and princesses directed their attention to building and decorating the cult halidom. Their activity of foundation and benefactor was equal to that of their men, and consisted of buildings, reconditioning, buying back manuscripts, and aim gifts in villages, money. All these actions had a spiritual end, being considered good deeds, which counted a lot during the Advent.

II CHAPTER: Exercising the regency

In order to exercise the regency, there were certain conditions that had to be accomplished: the queen had to be widow, legitimate wife of the dead Prince, mother of a masculine heir who needed to be minor (girls were not allowed to the throne).

The regency was seen as a temporary solution, due to the fact that ruling the state was a typically masculine task. It was considered a legitimate extension of the maternal rights materialized through the protection of the minor child and consequently of the country. This was one of the most important but also difficult task queens had to carry on, because in moments like these, the reign was threatened by all the possible candidates and people who aspired to impose their own favorites. Beneficiaries played an important role; they had to take care of the reign perpetuation but also of the relationships queens have to entertain with the noble families from the neighboring countries, able to influence the politic fate of Moldavia.

From a juridical point of view, queens were not allowed to sign any document as ruler of the country, but only as queens, mothers of their protected sons or widows of princes. This does not necessarily mean queens did not get involved into the country's politics, only that they were situated in a second plane, through a politic manifested indirectly, but which allowed influencing the sons.

As long as they have exercised their regency, the queens have kept the line of their husbands, representing an equilibrium element for their sons, for whom they guarded the spiritual and material heritage left by the consorts. They have never wanted the power for themselves, but for the minor princes they were protecting. Like true leaders, they defended through all the possible means the hereditary rights of their sons, willing to bear numerous battles and judgments. They have also emitted acts or they have initiated building activities to speak of their families, but all these as mothers or widows of the princes.

III CHAPTER:

Feminine princely presences at religious and secular ceremonies

Next to the princes, the queens were also present at religious and secular ceremonies. Christian holidays all over the year, the relic's reception, the pilgrimages, the cortege, the consecration represented essential moments of the act of faith and they imposed a numerous involvement. Either the queens do not turn off from these Christian assignments, showing themselves first as religious women, keepers of religious orders and then as wives of God chosen and as representatives of the reign.

Surpassing the religious area, they also took part to secular ceremonies. In journey cases we noticed that it dominates a personal note, stressed this time, by woman duty to follow the man. The return was seen as a positive thing and the departure as an interruption of the continuity, coming with the proper experiences. The itineraries undertaken willingly are opposed to those imposed by certain circumstances, but they are accepted as an assumption to the own destiny.

In the rooms of the princely court, the queens exerted toward their entourage similar prerogatives to those of the princes, following their example at ceremonies and feasts. When they became regents, they were entitled to involve themselves in activities that usually accrued to the princes, activities like the reception of the messengers, when they substituted a mature prince. Therefore, feminine princely presences at religious and secular ceremonies were achieved by personal reasons or as a result of the duties which follow from their statute of Moldavian princely consort.

IV CHAPTER: Essential moments of Christian life

The baptism, marriage or funeral involvement concerned a confined area of people, this thing differentiated them, in terms of size, by other social actions which took place in a public space, where all the holders of the power and their subjects were reunited.

Following these natural steps in the existence of each person, falls within the usual events area, but which could become extraordinary when the principal actors of the events were the representative of the elite. For the princely family these events took place at the limit between public and private, secular and religious.

The essential moments of Christian life were composed by transition rites through the ceremonial aspects they involved. The baptism marked the threshold between paganism and Christianity, the marriage that between childhood and maturity and the funeral emphasized the breaking of terrestrial life and the passage to the eternal one. The rituals were similar for women and men, for the elite and the commoners. In exchange, what made the difference between these social actions was, as we noticed, the way by which the elite changed such moments in real shows that evolved in front of the crowd. The presence of the religious element in all of the three rites offered in fact a spiritual emotion. The man was in this way accompanied, initiated, guided through the three „gates”, their meaning being man’s approach of God and the completion of the purpose of terrestrial life.

Among these essential moments of Christian life, that which evolved around the women is the funeral. In the case of marriage, the rituals were celebrated equally for both husbands and in that of the birth, the attention seems to be rather directed on the heir newcomer on the world. In these conditions, the death, followed by the entombment in the necropolis of the family, remained the only moment of the three which supposed rituals accomplished only for the queens and the princesses.

CONCLUSIONS

We announce from the very beginning of this approach that we wish the identification of the forms by which the queens and the princesses of Moldavia expressed their statute and their authority during XIV-XVII centuries. As a result of the analysis that we undertook over these forms of expression, it is necessary to see how and when can we talk about the expression of the statute and/or the authority at the women who belong to the elite that we consider in our study. The adherence of these women to the princely family entailed a series of privileges which together defined first their statute.

Being mothers, wives or princes daughters, they become holders of sovereign blazons, being the image of the princes on the throne.

The first but also the most evident signs of the statute were the aulic costume and the jewels with which the queens and the princesses appeared at the ceremonies and feasts. We add to these the crown, the supreme symbol of the princely power but- in the absence of a crowning ceremony, which offers to it sacrality- it remained, for women, only a symbol of the adherence at the princely family, a very important ornament, a way of hoarding. Another symbol of the statute that we analyzed is the seal. The application of a proper seal, which contained in the heraldic field the name of the emitter, on the send documents carried the proof of sovereignty. The use of the bicephalous eagle is also linked to the family but this time, it is not a symbol that the queens took over the princes but it is a symbol that is brought by them in the family of Moldavian princes.

If we have a simple look to the questions approached in our research, we notice that the characters considered by us lived their lives depending on two essential markers: the family and the faith. The entire medieval society was therefore built on kinship connection and considering the norms imposed by the Church. We extended our research on four centuries, an impressive period of time in which the situation of Moldavia changed depending on different internal and external elements, the political and social markers being changed too. With all these the idea of adherence to a nation and the expression of piety do not change but, on the contrary, they were kept and the practices around them developed and accentuated. This fact is maybe illustrated the best by the big number of donations and foundations made in name of the family, for the sin forgiveness and for the memory of the ancestors. But beyond of being spiritual acts, the foundations and the donations reflected the statute of those who achieved them. The construction and the bestowal of the churches, which only the members of the elite could make, requested material investment which could not be neglected. The princely family had also the right to offer donations to the Mount Athos, a right which was also used by the women.

In certain situations, the queens were watched as a counterweight of the princes. This aspect is visible in the use of titles, transpositions of the prince's titles in a feminine variation. In the case of ceremonies of the court and of the feasts which followed, we can also talk about a feminine equivalent of the masculine sovereign element. They were

composed of expressions of the life at the princely court, in which each action of the princes founded his correspondent in the queen's actions. The princely court represented the favorite space of the exercise of prerogatives they deserved as wives, mothers or princes daughters. In queens' rooms took place different activities: the documents issuance, the formation of the mail, the reception of the massagers or others visitors, the achievement of the garments and embroidery which will be offered to the founder of the family for the embellishment of the churches, the birth of the minor princes and princesses and the feasts. We also find here, in queen's rooms, the first signs of the expression of feminine elite authority. As queens, these women had around them a proper court, composed by a complex entourage, feminine and masculine, a copy of the entourage that escorted the princes. The existence of a special space decorated for the queens and of a personal entourage emphasizes the importance that these women enjoy, not at all their isolation in the rooms of the princely court.

Among all the aspects that we discussed, the regency is that which offered to the queens the possibility of showing their authority. Supported by the condition of widow and by the trusteeship over the minor sons, the regency offered to the queens some rights which brought them near- more than any others rights which followed from their adherence to the elite- to the idea of power and sovereignty. In these circumstances, the queens were entitled to take over the prince's duties and to exert themselves the prerogatives of the reign, substituting a mature prince.

Therefore, in the case of queens and princesses, we talk more about the statue-acquired by the adherence of the highest degree of the social hierarchy- than about authority- the recognition of their actions. We consider that the element that we would need if we talked about the power, in the case of women from princely families, is the crowning. As long as the queens were not anointed in enthronement ceremonies, their prerogatives could not be extended like those of the princes. The crowning marks also a meaningful difference between the queens of the Moldavia- and those from Walachia- and the byzantine empress or the queens from Occident. While for the last ones, the enthronement was that which bring them up to the position of empress or queens, the rise of Moldavian queens was possible through marriage.

From the aspects approached in our study results that women's life from princely Moldavian families - the life of all women- took place in the virtual limits imposed by a society dominated by the masculine element and by the church canons. None of these reasons favored women's place in a privileged position beside the men, but they established a place and a role in society, depending on those near they lived. Beside the common women, those of princely families seem privileged by the social position they owned, but they were also subdued to the same mentality of the time, having an important role in the realities of the time. Their actions were tolerated as long as they did not surpass the condition that the society and the church gave to them and they did not involve themselves in questions that were considered improper for women.

It would be maybe appropriate to extend our research over Walachia too or over the occidental and byzantine spaces. Certainly the analysis of the assertion forms of women's statute and authority in these spaces would complete the view over the things that we studied. However we do not see here a minus- if we consider the time that supposed a research of such amplex and the three years that we disposed for the achievement of our research- but rather an origin for further researches.